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MOSES AND MONOTHEISM
AN OUTLINE OF
PSYCHO-ANALYSIS
and
OTHER WORKS

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II

IF MOSES WAS AN EGYPTIAN . . .

IN an earlier contribution to this periodical,¹ I attempted to bring up a fresh argument in support of the hypothesis that the man Moses, the liberator and law-giver of the Jewish people, was not a Jew but an Egyptian. It had long been observed that his name was derived from the Egyptian vocabulary, though the fact had not been properly appreciated. What I added was that the interpretation of the myth of exposure which was linked with Moses necessarily led to the inference that he was an Egyptian whom the needs of a people sought to make into a Jew. I remarked at the end of my paper that important and far-reaching implications followed from the hypothesis that Moses was an Egyptian, but that I was not prepared to argue publicly in favour of these implications, since they were based only on psychological probabilities and lacked any objective proof. The greater the importance of the views arrived at in this way, the more strongly one feels the need to beware of exposing them without a secure basis to the critical assaults of the world around one—like a bronze statue with feet of clay. Not even the most tempting probability is a protection against error; even if all the parts of a problem seem to fit together like the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle, one must reflect that what is probable is not necessarily the truth and that the truth is not always probable. And lastly, it did not seem attractive to find oneself classed with the schoolmen and Talmudists who delight in exhibiting their ingenuity without regard to how remote from reality their thesis may be.

Notwithstanding these hesitations, which weigh as much with me to-day as they did before, the outcome of my conflicting motives is a decision to produce the present sequel to my earlier communication. But once again this is not the whole story nor the most important part of the whole story.

¹ *Imago*, 23 (1937). [Essay I above.]

(1)

If, then, Moses was an Egyptian—our first yield from this hypothesis is a fresh enigma and one which it is hard to solve. If a people or a tribe¹ sets out upon a great undertaking, it is only to be expected that one of its members will take his place as their leader or will be chosen for that post. But it is not easy to guess what could induce an aristocratic Egyptian—a prince, perhaps, or a priest or high official—to put himself at the head of a crowd of immigrant foreigners at a backward level of civilization and to leave his country with them. The well-known contempt felt by the Egyptians for foreign nationals makes such a proceeding particularly unlikely. Indeed I could well believe that this has been precisely why even those historians who have recognized that the man's name was Egyptian, and who have ascribed to him all the wisdom of the Egyptians [p. 9], have been unwilling to accept the obvious possibility that Moses was an Egyptian.

This first difficulty is promptly followed by another. We must not forget that Moses was not only the political leader of the Jews settled in Egypt but was also their law-giver and educator and forced them into the service of a new religion, which to this very day is known after him as the Mosaic one. But is it so easy for one single man to create a new religion? And if anyone wishes to influence another person's religion, would he not most naturally convert him to his own? The Jewish people in Egypt were certainly not without a religion of some form or other; and if Moses, who gave them a new one, was an Egyptian, the presumption cannot be put aside that this other new religion was the Egyptian one.

There is something that stands in the way of this possibility: the fact of there being the most violent contrast between the Jewish religion which is attributed to Moses and the religion of Egypt. The former is a rigid monotheism on the grand scale: there is only one God, he is the sole God, omnipotent, unapproachable; his aspect is more than human eyes can tolerate, no image must be made of him, even his name may not be spoken. In the Egyptian religion there is an almost innumerable host of deities of varying dignity and origin: a few personifica-

¹ We have no notion of what numbers were concerned in the Exodus from Egypt.

tions of great natural forces such as heaven and earth, sun and moon, an occasional abstraction such as Ma'at (truth or justice) or a caricature such as the dwarf-like Bes; but most of them local gods, dating from the period when the country was divided into numerous provinces, with the shape of animals, as though they had not yet completed their evolution from the old totem animals, with no sharp distinctions between them, and scarcely differing in the functions allotted to them. The hymns in honour of these gods say almost the same things about all of them, and identify them with one another unhesitatingly, in a manner hopelessly confusing to us. The names of gods are combined with one another, so that one of them may almost be reduced to being an epithet of the other. Thus, in the heyday of the 'New Kingdom' the principal god of the city of Thebes was called Amen-Re; the first part of this compound stands for the ram-headed god of the city, while Re is the name of the falcon-headed sun-god of On [Heliopolis]. Magical and ceremonial acts, charms and amulets dominated the service of these gods as they did the daily life of the Egyptians.

Some of these differences may easily be derived from the fundamental contrast between a strict monotheism and an unrestricted polytheism. Others are evidently the result of a difference in spiritual and intellectual¹ level, since one of these religions is very close to primitive phases [of development], while the other has risen to the heights of sublime abstraction. It may be due to these two factors that one occasionally has an impression that the contrast between the Mosaic and the Egyptian religions is a deliberate one and has been intentionally heightened—when, for instance, one of them condemns magic and sorcery in the severest terms, while in the other they proliferate with the greatest luxuriance, or when the insatiable appetite of the Egyptians for embodying their gods in clay, stone and metal (to which our museums owe so much to-day) is confronted with the harsh prohibition against making an image of any living or imagined creature.

But there is still another contrast between the two religions which is not met by the explanations we have attempted. No other people of antiquity did so much [as the Egyptians] to

¹ ['Geistig' is the word here translated 'spiritual and intellectual'. This concept becomes of great importance towards the end of this work, especially in Section C of Part II of Essay III. Cf. the footnote on p. 86.]

deny death or took such pains to make existence in the next world possible. And accordingly Osiris, the god of the dead, the ruler of this other world, was the most popular and undisputed of all the gods of Egypt. On the other hand the ancient Jewish religion renounced immortality entirely; the possibility of existence continuing after death is nowhere and never mentioned. And this is all the more remarkable since later experiences have shown that belief in an after-life is perfectly well compatible with a monotheist religion.

It was our hope that the hypothesis that Moses was an Egyptian would turn out to be fruitful and illuminating in various directions. But the first conclusion we drew from that hypothesis—that the new religion which he gave to the Jews was his own Egyptian one—has been invalidated by our realization of the different, and indeed contradictory, character of the two religions.

(2)

Another possibility is opened to us by a remarkable event in the history of the Egyptian religion, an event which has only lately been recognized and appreciated. It remains possible that the religion which Moses gave to his Jewish people was nevertheless his own—that it was *an* Egyptian religion, though not *the* Egyptian religion.

In the glorious Eighteenth Dynasty, under which Egypt first became a world power, a young Pharaoh came to the throne in about the year 1375 B.C. To begin with he was called, like his father, Amenophis (IV), but later he changed his name and not only his name. This king set about forcing a new religion on his Egyptian subjects—a religion which ran contrary to their thousands-of-years-old traditions and to all the familiar habits of their lives. It was a strict monotheism, the first attempt of the kind, so far as we know, in the history of the world, and along with the belief in a single god religious intolerance was inevitably born, which had previously been alien to the ancient world and remained so long afterwards. The reign of Amenophis, however, lasted for only seventeen years. Very soon after his death in 1358 B.C., the new religion was swept away and the memory of the heretic king was proscribed. What little we know of him is derived from the ruins of the new royal

capital which he built and dedicated to his god and from the inscriptions in the rock tombs adjacent to it. Whatever we can learn about this remarkable and, indeed, unique personality is deserving of the highest interest.¹

Every novelty must have its preliminaries and preconditions in something earlier. The origins of Egyptian monotheism can be traced back a little way with some certainty.² For a considerable time, tendencies had been at work among the priesthood of the sun temple at On (Heliopolis) in the direction of developing the idea of a universal god and of emphasizing the ethical side of his nature. Ma'at, the goddess of truth, order and justice, was a daughter of the sun god Re'. During the reign of Amenophis III, the father and predecessor of the reformer, the worship of the sun god had already gained a new impetus—probably in opposition to Amun of Thebes, who had become too powerful. A very ancient name of the sun god, Aten or Atum, was brought into fresh prominence, and the young king found in this Aten religion a movement ready to hand, which he did not have to be the first to inspire but of which he could become an adherent.

The political conditions in Egypt had begun at this time to exercise a lasting influence on the Egyptian religion. As a result of the military exploits of the great conqueror, Tuthmosis III, Egypt had become a world power: the empire now included Nubia in the south, Palestine, Syria and a part of Mesopotamia in the north. This imperialism was reflected in religion as universalism and monotheism. Since the Pharaoh's responsibilities now embraced not only Egypt but Nubia and Syria as well, deity too was obliged to abandon its national limitation and, just as the Pharaoh was the sole and unrestricted ruler of the world known to the Egyptians, this must also apply to the Egyptians' new deity. Moreover, with the extension of the empire's frontiers, it was natural that Egypt would become more accessible to foreign influences; some of the royal wives were Asiatic princesses,³ and it is possible that direct

¹ Breasted [1906, 356] calls him 'the first individual in human history'.

² What follows is in the main based on the accounts given by Breasted (1906 and 1934) and in the relevant sections of the *Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. II [1924].

³ This may perhaps be true even of Nefertiti, the beloved wife of Amenophis.

incitements to monotheism even made their way in from Syria.

Amenophis never denied his adherence to the sun cult of On. In the two Hymns to the Aten which have survived in the rock tombs and which were probably composed by him himself, he praises the sun as the creator and preserver of all living things both inside and outside Egypt with an ardour which is not repeated till many centuries later in the Psalms in honour of the Jewish god Yahweh. He was not content, however, with this astonishing anticipation of the scientific discovery of the effect of solar radiation. There is no doubt that he went a step further: that he did not worship the sun as a material object but as the symbol of a divine being whose energy was manifested in its rays.¹

We should not, however, be doing justice to the king if we regarded him merely as an adherent or promoter of an Aten religion already in existence before his time. His activity was a far more energetic intervention. He introduced something new, which for the first time converted the doctrine of a universal god into monotheism—the factor of exclusiveness. In one of his hymns he declares expressly: ‘O thou sole God, beside whom there is no other!’² And we must not forget that in assessing the new doctrine a knowledge of its *positive* contents is not enough: its *negative* side is almost equally important—a knowledge of what it rejects. It would be a mistake, too, to suppose that the new religion was completed at a single blow and sprang to life fully armed, like Athene out of the head of Zeus. Everything suggests, rather, that in the course of the reign of Amenophis it increased little by little to ever greater clarity, consistency, harshness and intolerance. It is likely that this development came about under the influence of the violent opposition to the

¹ ‘But, however evident the Heliopolitan origin of the new state religion might be, it was not merely sun-worship; the word Aton was employed in the place of the old word for “god” (*nuter*), and the god is clearly distinguished from the material sun.’ Breasted, 1906, 360.—‘It is evident that what the king was deifying was the force by which the Sun made himself felt on earth.’ Breasted, 1934, 279.—Erman (1905, 66) makes a similar judgement on a formula in honour of the god: ‘These are . . . words which are meant to express as abstractly as possible that it is not the heavenly body itself that is worshipped but the being which reveals itself in it.’

² Breasted, 1906, 374 n.

king’s reform which arose among the priests of Amun. In the sixth year of the reign of Amenophis this antagonism had reached such a pitch that the king changed his name, of which the proscribed name of the god Amun formed a part. Instead of ‘Amenophis’ he now called himself ‘Akhenaten’.¹ But it was not only from his own name that he expunged that of the detested god: he erased it too from every inscription—even where it occurred in the name of his father, Amenophis III. Soon after changing his name Akhenaten abandoned the Amun-dominated city of Thebes and built himself a new royal capital lower down the river, which he named Akhetaten (the horizon of the Aten). Its ruined site is now known as Tell el-‘Amarna.²

The persecution by the king fell most harshly upon Amun, but not on him alone. Throughout the kingdom temples were closed, divine service forbidden, temple property confiscated. Indeed, the king’s zeal went so far that he had the ancient monuments examined in order to have the word ‘god’ obliterated in them where it occurred in the plural.³ It is not to be wondered at that these measures taken by Akhenaten provoked a mood of fanatical vindictiveness among the suppressed priesthood and unsatisfied common people, and this was able to find free expression after the king’s death. The Aten religion had not become popular; it had probably remained restricted to a narrow circle surrounding the king’s person. Akhenaten’s end remains veiled in obscurity. We hear of a few short-lived, shadowy successors from his own family. His son-law, Tut‘ankhaten, was already compelled to return to Thebes and to replace the name of the god Aten in his name by that of Amun. There followed a period of anarchy till in 1350 B.C.

¹ [In the German editions the name is spelt ‘Ikhnaton’.] I adopt here the English spelling of the name (alternatively ‘Akhenaton’). The king’s new name has approximately the same meaning as his earlier one: ‘The god is satisfied.’ Cf. the German ‘Gotthold’ [‘God is gracious’] and ‘Gottfried’ [‘God is satisfied’].—[This footnote is translated literally from the German editions. In fact, ‘Ikhnaton’ was Breasted’s (American) version. For all this see the ‘Note on the Transcription of Proper Names’, p. 6 above.]

² It was there that in 1887 the discovery—of such great historical importance—was made of the Egyptian kings’ correspondence with their friends and vassals in Asia.

³ Breasted, 1906, 363.

a general, Haremhab, succeeded in restoring order. The glorious Eighteenth Dynasty was at an end and simultaneously its conquests in Nubia and Asia were lost. During this gloomy interregnum the ancient religions of Egypt were re-established. The Aten religion was abolished, Akhenaten's royal city was destroyed and plundered and his memory proscribed as that of a criminal.

It is with a particular purpose that we shall now emphasize a few points among the negative characteristics of the Aten religion. In the first place, everything to do with myths, magic and sorcery is excluded from it.¹ In the next place, the manner in which the sun-god was represented was no longer, as in the past, by a small pyramid and a falcon,² but—and this seems almost prosaic—by a round disk with rays proceeding from it, which end in human hands. In spite of all the exuberant art of the Amarna period, no other representation of the sun-god—no personal image of the Aten—has been found, and it may confidently be said that none will be found.³ Lastly, there was complete silence about the god of the dead, Osiris, and the kingdom of the dead. Neither the hymns nor the tomb inscriptions have any knowledge of what perhaps lay closest to the hearts of the Egyptians. The contrast to the popular religion cannot be more clearly demonstrated.⁴

(3)

I should now like to venture on this conclusion: if Moses was an Egyptian and if he communicated his own religion to the Jews, it must have been Akhenaten's, the Aten religion.

¹ Weigall (1922, 120-1) says that Akhenaten would hear nothing of a Hell against whose terrors people might protect themselves with innumerable magical formulae: 'Akhnaton flung all these formulae into the fire. Djins, bogies, spirits, monsters, demigods, demons, and Osiris himself with all his court, were swept into the blaze and reduced to ashes.'

² [This should perhaps read 'a pyramid or a falcon'. Cf. Breasted, 1934, 278.]

³ 'Akhnaton did not permit any graven image to be made of the Aton. The True God, said the king, had no form; and he held to this opinion throughout his life.' (Weigall, 1922, 103.)

⁴ 'Nothing was to be heard any more of Osiris and his kingdom.' (Erman, 1905, 70.)—'Osiris is completely ignored. He is never mentioned in any record of Ikhnaton or in any of the tombs at Amarna.' (Breasted, 1934, 291.)

I have already compared the Jewish religion with the popular religion of Egypt and shown the opposition between them. I must now make a comparison between the Jewish and the Aten religions in the expectation of proving their original identity. This, I am aware, will present no easy task. Thanks to the vindictiveness of the priests of Amun we may perhaps know too little of the Aten religion. We only know the Mosaic religion in its final shape, as it was fixed by the Jewish priesthood some eight hundred years later in post-exilic times. If, in spite of this unfavourable state of the material, we find a few indications which favour our hypothesis, we shall be able to set a high value on them.

There would be a short path to proving our thesis that the Mosaic religion was none other than that of the Aten—namely, if we had a confession of faith, a declaration. But I fear we shall be told that this path is closed to us. The Jewish confession of faith, as is well known, runs: 'Schema Jisroel Adonai Elohenu Adonai Echod.'¹ If it is not merely by chance that the name of the Egyptian Aten (or Atum) sounds like the Hebrew word *Adonai* [lord] and the name of the Syrian deity Adonis, but if it is due to a primaeval kinship of speech and meaning, then the Jewish formula might be translated thus: 'Hear, o Israel: our god Aten (Adonai) is a sole god.' Unfortunately I am totally incompetent to answer this question, and I have been able to find but little about it in the literature of the subject.² But in all probability this is making things too easy for us. In any case we shall have to come back once more to the problems concerning the name of the god.

The similarities as well as the differences between the two religions are easily discernible without giving us much light. Both of them were forms of a strict monotheism, and we shall be inclined *a priori* to trace back what they had in common to this fundamental characteristic. Jewish monotheism behaved in some respects even more harshly than the Egyptian: for instance

¹ ['Hear, o Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord' (*Deuteronomy*, vi, 4).]

² Only a few passages in Weigall (1922, 12 and 19), to the effect that 'the god Atum, the aspect of Ra as the setting sun, was probably of common origin with Aton who was largely worshipped in North Syria', and that a 'foreign queen with her retinue may have therefore felt more sympathy with Heliopolis than with Thebes.' [The connection between Aten and Atum, suggested by Weigall, is not generally accepted by Egyptologists.]

in forbidding pictorial representations of any kind. The most essential difference is to be seen (apart from their gods' names) in the fact that the Jewish religion was entirely without sun-worship, in which the Egyptian one still found support. When we were making the comparison with the popular religion of Egypt, we had an impression that, apart from the fundamental contrast, a factor of *intentional* contradiction played a part in the difference between the two religions. This impression seems to be justified if now, in making the comparison, we replace the Jewish religion by the Aten religion which, as we know, was developed by Akhenaten in deliberate hostility to the popular one. We were rightly surprised to find that the Jewish religion would have nothing to do with the next world or a life after death, though a doctrine of that kind would have been compatible with the strictest monotheism. But this surprise vanishes if we turn back from the Jewish to the Aten religion and suppose that this refusal was taken over from it, since for Akhenaten it was a necessity in his fight against the popular religion, in which Osiris, the god of the dead, played a greater part, perhaps, than any god in the upper world. The agreement between the Jewish and the Aten religions on this important point is the first strong argument in favour of our thesis. We shall learn that it is not the only one.

Moses did not only give the Jews a new religion; it can be stated with equal certainty that he introduced the custom of circumcision to them. This fact is of decisive importance for our problem and has scarcely ever been considered. It is true that the Biblical account contradicts this more than once. On the one hand it traces circumcision back to the patriarchal age as a mark of a covenant between God and Abraham; on the other hand it describes in a quite particularly obscure passage how God was angry with Moses for having neglected a custom which had become holy,¹ and sought to kill him; but that his wife, a Midianite, saved her husband from God's wrath by quickly performing the operation.² These, however, are distortions, which should not lead us astray; later on we shall discover the reason for them. The fact remains that there is only one answer to the question of where the Jews derived the custom of cir-

¹ 'Heilig.' [Cf. p. 120.]

² [Genesis, xvii, 9 ff. and Exodus, iv, 24 ff. Cf. the explanation of the episode on p. 44 below.]

cumcision from—namely, from Egypt. Herodotus, the 'father of history', tells us that the custom of circumcision had long been indigenous in Egypt,¹ and his statements are confirmed by the findings in mummies and indeed by pictures on the walls of tombs. No other people of the Eastern Mediterranean, so far as we know, practised this custom; it may safely be presumed that the Semites, Babylonians and Sumerians were uncircumcised. The Bible story itself says this is so of the inhabitants of Canaan; it is a necessary premiss to the adventure of Jacob's daughter and the prince of Shechem.² The possibility that the Jews acquired the custom of circumcision during their sojourn in Egypt in some way other than in connection with the religious teaching of Moses may be rejected as completely without foundation. Now, taking it as certain that circumcision was a universal popular custom in Egypt, let us for a moment adopt the ordinary hypothesis that Moses was a Jew, who sought to free his compatriots from bondage in Egypt and lead them to develop an independent and self-conscious national existence in another country—which was what in fact happened. What sense could it have, in that case, that he should at the same time impose on them a troublesome custom which even, to some extent, made them into Egyptians and which must keep permanently alive their memory of Egypt—whereas his efforts could only be aimed in the opposite direction, towards alienating his people from the land of their bondage and overcoming their longing for the 'flesh-pots of Egypt'? No, the fact from which we started and the hypothesis which we added to it are so incompatible with each other that we may be bold enough to reach this conclusion: if Moses gave the Jews not only a new religion but also the commandment for circumcision, he

¹ [Herodotus, *History*, Book II, Chapter 104.]

² [Genesis, xxxiv.] I am very well aware that in dealing so autocratically and arbitrarily with Biblical tradition—bringing it up to confirm my views when it suits me and unhesitatingly rejecting it when it contradicts me—I am exposing myself to serious methodological criticism and weakening the convincing force of my arguments. But this is the only way in which one can treat material of which one knows definitely that its trustworthiness has been severely impaired by the distorting influence of tendentious purposes. It is to be hoped that I shall find some degree of justification later on, when I come upon the track of these secret motives. Certainty is in any case unattainable and moreover it may be said that every other writer on the subject has adopted the same procedure.

was not a Jew but an Egyptian, and in that case the Mosaic religion was probably an Egyptian one and, in view of its contrast to the popular religion, the religion of the Aten, with which the later Jewish religion agrees in some remarkable respects.

I have pointed out that my hypothesis that Moses was not a Jew but an Egyptian created a fresh riddle. His course of conduct, which seemed easily intelligible in a Jew, was understandable in an Egyptian. If, however, we place Moses in the time of Akhenaten and suppose him in contact with that Pharaoh, the riddle vanishes and the possibility is revealed of motives which will answer all our questions. Let us start from the assumption that Moses was an aristocratic and prominent man, perhaps in fact a member of the royal house, as the legend says of him. He was undoubtedly aware of his great capacities, ambitious and energetic; he may even have played with the notion of one day being the leader of his people, of becoming the kingdom's ruler. Being close to the Pharaoh, he was a convinced adherent of the new religion, whose basic thoughts he had made his own. When the king died and the reaction set in, he saw all his hopes and prospects destroyed; if he was not prepared to abjure all the convictions that were so dear to him, Egypt had nothing more to offer him—he had lost his country. In this predicament he found an unusual solution. Akhenaten the dreamer had alienated his people and let his empire fall to pieces. The more energetic nature of Moses was more at home with the plan of founding a new kingdom, of finding a new people to whom he would present for their worship the religion which Egypt had disdained. It was, we can see, a heroic attempt to combat destiny, to compensate in two directions for the losses in which Akhenaten's catastrophe had involved him. Perhaps he was at that time Governor of the frontier province (Goshen) in which certain Semitic tribes had settled (perhaps as early as in the Hyksos period¹). These he chose to be his new people—a historic decision.² He came to an agreement with them, put

¹ [A disordered period some 200 years before the time of Akhenaten, when a Semitic people (the so-called 'Shepherd Kings') ruled Northern Egypt.]

² If Moses was a high official, this makes it easier to understand the role of leader which he assumed with the Jews; if he was a priest, then it was natural for him to emerge as the founder of a religion. In both these cases he would have been continuing his former profession. A

himself at their head and carried the Exodus through 'by strength of hand'.¹ In complete contrast to the Biblical tradition, we may presume that this Exodus took place peacefully and unpursued. The authority of Moses made this possible and at that time there was no central administration which might have interfered with it.

According to this construction of ours, the Exodus from Egypt would have occurred during the period between 1358 and 1350 B.C.—that is, after Akhenaten's death and before Haremhab's re-establishment of state authority.² The goal of the migration could only have been the land of Canaan. After the collapse of the Egyptian domination, hordes of warlike Aramaeans had irrupted into that region, conquering and plundering, and had shown in that way where a capable people might win fresh land for themselves. We learn of these warriors from the letters found in 1887 in the ruined city of Amarna. There they are called 'Habiru', and the name was transferred (we do not know how) to the later Jewish invaders—'Hebrews'—who cannot be intended in the Amarna letters. South of Palestine, too, in Canaan, there lived the tribes which were the nearest relatives of the Jews who were now making their way out of Egypt.

The motives which we have discovered for the Exodus as a whole apply also to the introduction of circumcision. We are familiar with the attitude adopted by people (both nations and individuals) to this primaeval usage, which is scarcely understood any longer. Those who do not practise it look on it as very strange and are a little horrified by it, but those who have adopted circumcision are proud of it. They feel exalted by it,

prince of the royal house might easily have been both—a provincial governor and a priest. In the account given by Flavius Josephus (in his *Jewish Antiquities*), who accepts the exposure legend but seems to be in touch with traditions other than the Biblical one, Moses, as an Egyptian general, fought a victorious campaign in Ethiopia. [English translation, 1930, 269 ff.]

¹ [*Exodus*, xiii, 3, 14 and 16.]

² This would make the Exodus about a century earlier than is supposed by most historians, who put it in the Nineteenth Dynasty under Merenptah [sometimes transliterated 'Meneptah']. Or it may have happened a little later [than is suggested in the text above], for the official [Egyptian] histories seem to have included the interregnum in the reign of Haremhab. [See below, p. 48.]

ennobled, as it were, and look down with contempt on the others, whom they regard as unclean. Even to this day a Turk will abuse a Christian as an 'uncircumcised dog'. It may be supposed that Moses, who, being an Egyptian, was himself circumcised, shared this attitude. The Jews with whom he departed from his country were to serve him as a superior substitute for the Egyptians he had left behind. On no account must the Jews be inferior to them. He wished to make them into a 'holy nation', as is expressly stated in the Biblical text,¹ and as a mark of this consecration he introduced among them too the custom which made them at least the equals of the Egyptians. And he could only welcome it if they were to be isolated by such a sign and kept apart from the foreign peoples among whom their wanderings would lead them, just as the Egyptians themselves had kept apart from all foreigners.²

Later on, however, Jewish tradition behaved as though it were put at a disadvantage by the inference we have been drawing. If it were to be admitted that circumcision was an Egyptian custom introduced by Moses, that would be almost as much as to recognize that the religion delivered to them by Moses was an Egyptian one too. There were good reasons for denying that fact, so the truth about circumcision must also be contradicted.

¹ [*Exodus*, xix, 6. The same word is used in this connection elsewhere in the Authorized Version, e.g. *Deuteronomy*, vii, 6. Cf. p. 120.]

² Herodotus, who visited Egypt about 450 B.C., enumerates in his account of his journey characteristics of the Egyptian people which exhibit an astonishing similarity to traits familiar to us in later Jewry: 'They are altogether more religious in every respect than any other people, and differ from them too in a number of their customs. Thus they practise circumcision, which they were the first to introduce, and on grounds of cleanliness. Further they have a horror of pigs, which is no doubt related to the fact that Seth in the form of a black pig wounded Horus. And lastly and most markedly, they hold cows in the greatest honour, and would never eat or sacrifice them, because this would offend Isis with her cow's horns. For that reason no Egyptian man or woman would ever kiss a Greek or use his knife or his spit or his cauldron or eat the flesh of an otherwise clean ox if it had been cut with a Greek knife . . . They look down in narrow-minded pride on other people, who are unclean and are not so close to the gods as they are.' (Erman, 1905, 181.) [This is a summary by Erman of Chapters 36 to 47 of Book II of Herodotus.]—We must not, of course, overlook parallels to this in the life of the Indian people.—And, incidentally, who suggested to the Jewish poet Heine in the nineteenth century A.D. that he should complain

(4)

At this point I expect to be met by an objection to my hypothesis. This placed Moses, an Egyptian, in the Akhenaten period. It derived his decision to take over the Jewish people from the political circumstances in the country at that time, and it recognized the religion that he presented to or imposed on his *protégés* as the Aten religion, which had actually collapsed in Egypt itself. I expect to be told that I have brought forward this structure of conjectures with too much positiveness, for which there is no basis in the material. This objection is, I think, unjustified. I have already laid stress on the factor of doubt in my introductory remarks; I have, as it were, placed that factor outside the brackets and I may be allowed to save myself the trouble of repeating it in connection with each item *inside* them.¹

I may continue the discussion with a few critical remarks of my own. The kernel of my hypothesis—the dependence of Jewish monotheism on the monotheist episode in Egyptian history—has been suspected and mentioned by various writers. I spare myself the trouble of quoting these opinions here, since none of them is able to indicate how this influence can have come into operation. Even though in our view that influence remains linked to the figure of Moses, we ought also to mention some other possibilities in addition to the one we prefer. It must not be supposed that the fall of the official Aten religion brought the monotheist current in Egypt to a complete stop. The priesthood at On, from which it started, survived the catastrophe and may have continued to bring under the sway of its trend of ideas generations after Akhenaten's. Thus the action taken by Moses is still conceivable even if he did not live at the time of Akhenaten and did not fall under his personal influence, if he was only an adherent or perhaps a member of the priesthood of On. This possibility would postpone the date of the Exodus and bring it closer to the date which is usually adopted (in the thirteenth century); but it has nothing else to recommend it. Our insight into the motives of Moses would be lost and the facilitation of the Exodus by the prevailing anarchy in the

of his religion as 'the plague dragged along from the Nile valley, the unhealthy beliefs of Ancient Egypt'? [From a poem on 'The New Jewish Hospital in Hamburg', *Zeitgedichte*, XI.]

¹ [This, of course, is a simile from algebra.]

country would no longer apply. The succeeding kings of the Nineteenth Dynasty established a strong *régime*. It was only during the period immediately after the heretic king's death that there was a convergence of all the conditions, external and internal alike, that were favourable to the Exodus.

The Jews possess a copious literature apart from the Bible, in which the legends and myths are to be found which grew up in the course of centuries round the imposing figure of their first leader and the founder of their religion, and which have both illuminated and obscured it. Scattered in this material there may be fragments of trustworthy tradition for which no room was found in the Pentateuch. A legend of this sort gives an engaging account of how the ambition of the man Moses found expression even in his childhood. Once when Pharaoh had taken him in his arms and playfully lifted him high in the air, the little three-year-old boy snatched the crown from the king's head and put it on his own. This portent alarmed the king, who did not fail to consult his wise men about it.¹ There are stories elsewhere of his victorious military actions as an Egyptian general in Ethiopia, and, in this connection, how he fled from Egypt because he had reason to be afraid of the envy of a party at Court or of Pharaoh himself. The Biblical account itself attributes some features to Moses to which credence may well be given. It describes him as being of an irascible nature, flaring up easily, as when, in indignation, he slew the brutal overseer who was ill-treating a Jewish workman, or when in his anger at the people's apostasy he broke the Tables of the Law which he had brought down from the Mount of God [Sinai];² indeed God himself punished him in the end for an impatient deed, but we are not told what it was.³ Since a trait of this kind is not one that would serve for his glorification, it may perhaps correspond to a historical truth. Nor can the possibility be excluded that some of the character traits which the Jews included in their early picture of their God—describing

¹ This anecdote, in a slightly different form, also appears in Josephus. [*Jewish Antiquities*. English translation, 1930, 265 f.]

² [*Exodus*, ii, 11-12; xxxii, 19.]

³ [If this is a reference to Moses, at the end of his life, not being allowed to enter the Promised Land (*Deuteronomy*, xxxiv, 4), the explanation was in fact that he had shown impatience by striking the rock with his rod to draw water instead of merely speaking to it (*Numbers*, xx, 11-12).]

him as jealous, severe and ruthless—may have been at bottom derived from a recollection of Moses; for in fact it was not an invisible God but the man Moses who brought them out of Egypt.

Another trait attributed to Moses has a special claim to our interest. Moses is said to have been 'slow of speech': he must have suffered from an inhibition or disorder of speech. Consequently, in his supposed dealings with Pharaoh, he needed the support of Aaron, who is called his brother.¹ This again may be a historical truth and would make a welcome contribution to presenting a lively picture of the great man. But it may also have another and more important significance. It may recall, slightly distorted, the fact that Moses spoke another language and could not communicate with his Semitic neo-Egyptians without an interpreter, at all events at the beginning of their relations—a fresh confirmation, then, of the thesis that Moses was an Egyptian.

Now, however, or so it seems, our work has reached a provisional end. For the moment we can draw no further conclusions from our hypothesis that Moses was an Egyptian, whether it has been proved or not. No historian can regard the Biblical account of Moses and the Exodus as anything other than a pious piece of imaginative fiction, which has recast a remote tradition for the benefit of its own tendentious purposes. The original form of that tradition is unknown to us; we should be glad to discover what the distorting purposes were, but we are kept in the dark by our ignorance of the historical events. The fact that our reconstruction leaves no room for a number of show-pieces in the Bible story, such as the ten plagues, the passage of the Red Sea and the solemn law-giving on Mount Sinai—this does not disconcert us. But we cannot treat it as a matter of indifference if we find ourselves in contradiction to the findings of the sober historical researches of the present day.

These modern historians, of whom we may take Eduard Meyer (1906) as a representative, agree with the Bible story on one decisive point. They too are of opinion that the Jewish tribes, which later developed into the people of Israel, took on a new religion at a certain point of time. But in their view this did not take place in Egypt or at the foot of a mountain in the

¹ [*Exodus*, iv, 10 and 14.]

Sinai Peninsula, but in a certain locality known as Meribah-Kadesh,¹ an oasis distinguished by its wealth of springs and wells in the stretch of country south of Palestine, between the eastern exit from the Sinai Peninsula and the western border of Arabia.² There they took over the worship of a god Yahweh,³ probably from the neighbouring Arabian tribe of Midianites. It seems likely that other tribes in the vicinity were also followers of this god.

Yahweh was unquestionably a volcano god. Now, as is well known, Egypt is without volcanoes and the mountains of the Sinai Peninsula have never been volcanic; on the other hand, there are volcanoes which may have been active till recent times along the western border of Arabia. So one of these mountains must have been the Sinai-Horeb which was regarded as the home of Yahweh.⁴ In spite of all the revisions to which the Biblical story was subjected, the original picture of the god's character can, according to Eduard Meyer, be reconstructed: he was an uncanny, bloodthirsty demon who went about by night and shunned the light of day.⁵

The mediator between God and the people in the founding of this religion was named Moses. He was the son-in-law of the Midianite priest Jethro, and was keeping his flocks when he received the summons from God. He was also visited by Jethro at Kadesh and given some advice by him.⁶

Though Eduard Meyer says, it is true, that he never doubted that there was some historical core in the story of the sojourn in Egypt and the catastrophe to the Egyptians,⁷ he evidently does not know how to place and what use to make of this fact

¹ [Throughout this work Freud uses the more technical phonetic spelling of the latter part of this name: Qades. We have adopted the ordinary English version.]

² [Its precise position seems uncertain, but it was probably in what is now known as the Negev, on about the same latitude as Petra but some fifty miles further to the West. It is not to be confused with the better-known Kadesh in Syria, to the north of Palestine, which was the scene of a much boasted victory by Ramesses II over the Hittites.]

³ [This is the usual English spelling. Freud uses the corresponding German one: 'Jahve'.]

⁴ At a few places in the Biblical text it is still stated that Yahweh came down from Sinai to Meribah-Kadesh. [E.g. *Numbers*, xx, 6-9.—Sinai and Horeb are usually taken as different names of the same mountain.]

⁵ Meyer, 1906, 38 and 58.

⁶ [*Exodus*, iii, 1 and xviii, 2-27.]

⁷ Meyer, 1906, 49.

which he recognizes. The only thing he is prepared to derive from Egypt is the custom of circumcision. He adds two important indications which go to confirm our previous arguments: first, that Joshua ordered the people to be circumcised in order to 'roll away the reproach [i.e. contempt] of Egypt from off you',¹ and secondly a quotation from Herodotus saying that 'the Phoenicians (no doubt the Jews) and the Syrians of Palestine themselves admit that they learnt the custom of the Egyptians'.² But he has little to say in favour of an Egyptian Moses: 'The Moses we know is the ancestor of the priests of Kadesh—that is, a figure from a genealogical legend, standing in relation to a cult, and not a historical personality. Thus (apart from those who accept tradition root and branch as historical truth) no one who treats him as a historical figure has been able to give any content to him, to represent him as a concrete individual or to point out what he may have done and what his historical work may have been.'³

On the other hand, Meyer is never tired of insisting on the relation of Moses to Kadesh and Midian: 'The figure of Moses, which is intimately bound up with Midian and the cult-centres in the desert. . . .'⁴ and: 'This figure of Moses, then, is inseparably linked with Kadesh (Massah and Meribah⁵) and this is supplemented by his being the son-in-law of the Midianite priest. His link with the Exodus, on the contrary, and the whole story of his youth are entirely secondary and simply the consequence of the interpolation of Moses into a connected and continuous legendary story.'⁶ Meyer also points out that the themes included in the story of the youth of Moses were one and all dropped later: 'Moses in Midian is no longer an Egyptian and grandson of Pharaoh, but a shepherd to whom Yahweh revealed himself. In telling of the plagues there is no longer any talk of his former connections, though effective use might easily have been made of them, and the command to kill the [new-born] sons of the Israelites⁷ is completely forgotten. In the Exodus and the destruction of the Egyptians

¹ [*Joshua*, v, 9.]

² Meyer, 1906, 449. [Quoted from Herodotus, *History*, Book II, Chapter 104.]

³ Meyer, 1906, 451 [footnote].

⁴ Meyer, 1906, 49.

⁵ [These seem to be the names of springs at Kadesh. Cf. *Exodus*, xvii, 7.]

⁶ Meyer, 1906, 72.

⁷ [*Exodus*, i, 16 and 22.]

Moses plays no part whatever: he is not even mentioned. The heroic character which the legend of his childhood presupposes is totally absent from the later Moses; he is only the man of God, a miracle-worker equipped by Yahweh with supernatural powers.¹

We cannot dispute the impression that this Moses of Kadesh and Midian, to whom tradition could actually attribute the erection of a brazen serpent as a god of healing,² is someone quite other than the aristocratic Egyptian inferred by us, who presented the people with a religion in which all magic and spells were proscribed in the strictest terms. Our Egyptian Moses is no less different, perhaps, from the Midianite Moses than is the universal god Aten from the demon Yahweh in his home on the Mount of God. And if we have any faith at all in the pronouncements of the recent historians, we shall have to admit that the thread which we have tried to spin from our hypothesis that Moses was an Egyptian has broken for the second time. And this time, as it seems, with no hope of mending.

(5)

Unexpectedly, here once more a way of escape presents itself. Efforts to see in Moses a figure that goes beyond the priest of Kadesh, and to confirm the grandeur with which tradition glorifies him, have not ceased even since Eduard Meyer. (Cf. Gressmann [1913] and others.) Then, in 1922, Ernst Sellin made a discovery which affected our problem decisively. He found in the Prophet Hosea (in the second half of the eighth century B.C.) unmistakable signs of a tradition to the effect that Moses, the founder of their religion, met with a violent end in a rising of his refractory and stiff-necked people, and that at the same time the religion he had introduced was thrown off. This tradition is not, however, restricted to Hosea; it reappears in most of the later Prophets, and indeed, according to Sellin, became the basis of all the later Messianic expectations. At the end of the Babylonian captivity a hope grew up among the Jewish people that the man who had been so shamefully murdered would return from the dead and would lead his remorseful people, and perhaps not them alone, into the kingdom of lasting bliss. The obvious connection of this with the

¹ Meyer, 1906, 47.

² [Numbers, xxi, 9.]

destiny of the founder of a later religion does not concern us here.

Once again I am not, of course, in a position to judge whether Sellin has interpreted the passages from the Prophets correctly. But if he is right we may attribute historical credibility to the tradition he has recognized, for such things are not readily invented. There is no tangible motive for doing so; but if they have really happened, it is easy to understand that people will be anxious to forget them. We need not accept all the details of the tradition. In Sellin's opinion Shittim, in the country east of the Jordan, is to be regarded as the scene of the attack on Moses. But we shall soon see that that region is not acceptable for our notions.

We will borrow from Sellin his hypothesis that the Egyptian Moses was murdered by the Jews and the religion he had introduced abandoned. This allows us to spin our threads further without contradicting the authentic findings of historical research. But apart from this we shall venture to maintain independence of the authorities and to 'proceed along our own track'. The Exodus from Egypt remains our starting-point. A considerable number of people must have left the country with Moses; a small collection would not have seemed worth while to this ambitious man with his large aims in view. The immigrants had probably been living in Egypt long enough to have grown into quite a large population. But we shall certainly not be going wrong if we assume, with the majority of the authorities, that only a fraction of what was later to be the Jewish people had experienced the events in Egypt. In other words, the tribe that returned from Egypt joined up later, in the stretch of country between Egypt and Canaan, with other kindred tribes, which had been settled there for a considerable time. This union, from which sprang the people of Israel, found expression in the adoption of a new religion, common to all the tribes, the religion of Yahweh—an event which, according to Eduard Meyer [1906, 60 ff.], took place under Midianite influence at Kadesh. Thereafter, the people felt strong enough to undertake their invasion of the land of Canaan. It would not tally with this course of events to suppose that the catastrophe to Moses and his religion occurred in the country east of the Jordan; it must have happened long before the union of the tribes.

There can be no doubt that very different elements came together in the construction of the Jewish people; but what must have made the greatest difference among these tribes was whether they had experienced or not the sojourn in Egypt and what followed it. Having regard to this point, we may say that the nation arose out of a union of two component parts; and it fits in with this that, after a short period of political unity, it split into two pieces—the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah. History is fond of reinstatements like this, where a later fusion is undone and an earlier separation re-emerges. The most impressive example of this was afforded, as is well known, by the Reformation, which, after an interval of over a thousand years, brought to light once more the frontier between the Germany which had at one time been Roman and the Germany which had remained independent. In the instance of the Jewish people it is not possible to point to such a faithful reproduction of the old state of things; our knowledge of those times is too uncertain to allow us to assert that the settled tribes were once more to be found together in the Northern Kingdom and those who had returned from Egypt in the Southern Kingdom; but here too the later split cannot have been unrelated to the earlier joining up. The former Egyptians were probably fewer in numbers than the others, but showed themselves culturally the stronger. They exercised a more powerful influence on the further evolution of the people, because they brought along with them a tradition which the others lacked.

Perhaps they brought something else with them more tangible than a tradition. One of the greatest enigmas of Jewish prehistory is that of the origin of the Levites. They are traced back to one of the twelve tribes of Israel—that of Levi—but no tradition has ventured to say where that tribe was originally located or what portion of the conquered land of Canaan was allotted to it. They filled the most important priestly offices, but they were distinct from the priests. A Levite is not necessarily a priest; nor is it the name of a caste. Our hypothesis about the figure of Moses suggests an explanation. It is incredible that a great lord, like Moses the Egyptian, should have joined this alien people unaccompanied. He certainly must have brought a retinue with him—his closest followers, his scribes, his domestic servants. This is who the Levites originally were. The tradition which alleges that Moses was a Levite seems to be a

clear distortion of the fact: the Levites were the followers of Moses. This solution is supported by the fact which I have already mentioned in my earlier essay that it is only among the Levites that Egyptian names occur later.¹ It is to be presumed that a fair number of these followers of Moses escaped the catastrophe which descended on him himself and the religion he founded. They multiplied in the course of the next generations, became fused with the people they lived among, but remained loyal to their master, preserved his memory and carried out the tradition of his doctrines. At the time of the union with the disciples of Yahweh they formed an influential minority, culturally superior to the rest.

I put it forward as a provisional hypothesis that between the fall of Moses and the establishment of the new religion at Kadesh two generations, or perhaps even a century, elapsed. I see no means of deciding whether the Neo-Egyptians (as I should like to call them here)—that is, those who returned from Egypt—met their tribal kinsmen after the latter had already adopted the Yahweh religion or earlier. The second possibility might seem the more probable. But there would be no difference in the outcome. What happened at Kadesh was a compromise, in which the share taken by the tribes of Moses is unmistakable.

Here we may once again call on the evidence afforded by circumcision, which has repeatedly been of help to us, like, as it were, a key-fossil. This custom became obligatory in the Yahweh religion as well and, since it was indissolubly linked with Egypt, its adoption can only have been a concession to the followers of Moses, who—or the Levites among them—would not renounce this mark of their holiness. [P. 30.] So much of their old religion they wished to rescue, and in return for it they were prepared to accept the new deity and what the priests of Midian told them about it. They may possibly have gained yet other concessions. We have already mentioned that Jewish ritual prescribed certain restrictions on the use of God's name. Instead of 'Yahweh' the word 'Adonai [Lord]' must be spoken. It is tempting to bring this prescription into our context, but

¹ [This earlier mention is not to be found. It was no doubt dropped in the course of Freud's revisions of the book. See, however, an Editor's addition to a footnote on p. 15.] My hypothesis fits in well with Yahuda's statements on the Egyptian influence on early Jewish literature. See Yahuda, 1929.

that is only a conjecture without any other basis. The prohibition upon a god's name is, as is well known, a taboo of *primaeval* age. We do not understand why it was revived precisely in the Jewish Law; it is not impossible that this happened under the influence of a fresh motive. There is no need to suppose that the prohibition was carried through consistently; in the construction of theophorous personal names—that is, in compounds—the name of the God Yahweh might be freely used (e.g. Jochanan, Jehu, Joshua). There were, however, special circumstances connected with this name. As we know, critical Biblical research supposes that the Hexateuch has two documentary sources.¹ These are distinguished as J and E, because one of them uses 'Jahve [Yahweh]' as the name of God and the other 'Elohim': 'Elohim', to be sure, not 'Adonai'. But we may bear in mind a remark by one of our authorities: 'The different names are a clear indication of two originally different gods.'²

We brought up the retention of circumcision as evidence for the fact that the founding of the religion at Kadesh involved a compromise. We can see its nature from the concordant accounts given by J and E, which thus go back on this point to a common source (a documentary or oral tradition). Its leading purpose was to demonstrate the greatness and power of the new god Yahweh. Since the followers of Moses attached so much value to their experience of the Exodus from Egypt, this act of liberation had to be represented as due to Yahweh, and the event was provided with embellishments which gave proof of the terrifying grandeur of the volcano god—such as the pillar of smoke [cloud] which changed at night into a pillar of fire and the storm which laid bare the bed of the sea for a while, so that the pursuers were drowned by the returning waters.³ This account brought the Exodus and the founding of the religion close together, and disavowed the long interval between them. So, too, the law-giving was represented as occurring not at Kadesh but at the foot of the Mount of God, marked by a volcanic eruption. This account, however, did grave injustice to the memory of the man Moses; it was he and not the volcano god who had liberated the people from Egypt. So a compensation was owing to him, and it consisted in the man Moses being transferred to Kadesh or to Sinai-Horeb and put in the place of

¹ [This is elaborated on p. 42 below.]

² Gressmann, 1913, 54.

³ [Exodus, xiii, 21 and xiv, 21-8.]

the Midianite priests. We shall find later that this solution satisfied another imperatively pressing purpose. In this manner a mutual agreement, as it were, was arrived at: Yahweh, who lived on a mountain in Midian, was allowed to extend over into Egypt, and, in exchange for this, the existence and activity of Moses were extended to Kadesh and as far as the country east of the Jordan. Thus he was fused with the figure of the later religious founder, the son-in-law of the Midianite Jethro [p. 35], and lent him his name of Moses. Of this second Moses, however, we can give no personal account—so completely was he eclipsed by the first, the Egyptian Moses—unless we pick out the contradictions in the Biblical description of the character of Moses. He is often pictured as domineering, hot-tempered and even violent, yet he is also described as the mildest and most patient of men.¹ These last qualities would evidently have fitted in badly with the Egyptian Moses, who had to deal with his people in such great and difficult matters; they may have belonged to the character of the other Moses, the Midianite. We are, I think, justified in separating the two figures and in assuming that the Egyptian Moses was never at Kadesh and had never heard the name of Yahweh, and that the Midianite Moses had never been in Egypt and knew nothing of Aten. In order to solder the two figures together, tradition or legend had the task of bringing the Egyptian Moses to Midian, and we have seen that more than one explanation of this was current.

(6)

Once again I am prepared to find myself blamed for having presented my reconstruction of the early history of the people of Israel with too great and unjustified certainty. I shall not feel very severely hit by this criticism, since it finds an echo in my own judgement. I know myself that my structure has its weak spots, but it has its strong points too. On the whole my predominant impression is that it is worth while to pursue the work in the direction it has taken.

The Bible narrative that we have before us contains precious and, indeed, invaluable historical data, which, however, have been distorted by the influence of powerful tendentious purposes and embellished by the products of poetic invention. In the

¹ [See, for instance, Exodus, xxxii, 19 and Numbers, xii, 3.]

course of our efforts so far, we have been able to detect one of these distorting purposes [p. 40]. That discovery points our further path. We must uncover other similar tendentious purposes. If we find means of recognizing the distortions produced by those purposes, we shall bring to light fresh fragments of the true state of things lying behind them.

And we will begin by listening to what critical Biblical research is able to tell us about the history of the origin of the Hexateuch, the five books of Moses and the book of Joshua, which alone concern us here.¹ The earliest documentary source is accepted as J (the Yahwistic writer), who in the most recent times has been identified as the priest Ebyatar, a contemporary of King David.² Somewhat—it is not known how much—later we come to the so-called Elohist writer [E], who belonged to the Northern Kingdom.³ After the collapse of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C., a Jewish priest combined portions of J and E and made some additions of his own. His compilation is designated as JE. In the seventh century *Deuteronomy*, the fifth book, was added to this. It is supposed to have been found complete in the Temple. In the period after the destruction of the Temple (586 B.C.), during and after the Exile, the revision known as the 'Priestly Code' was compiled; and in the fifth century the work was given its final revision and since then has not been changed in its essentials.⁴

The history of King David and of his period is most probably the work of a contemporary. It is genuine historical writing,

¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Eleventh Edition, Vol. III, 1910. Article 'Bible'.

² See Auerbach (1932).

³ The Yahwistic and Elohist writings were first distinguished by Astruc in 1753. [Jean Astruc (1684–1766) was a French physician attached to the Court of Louis XV.]

⁴ It is historically certain that the Jewish type was finally fixed as a result of the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah in the fifth century before Christ—that is, after the Exile, under the Persian domination which was friendly to the Jews. On our reckoning, some nine hundred years had passed since the emergence of Moses. These reforms took seriously the regulations that aimed at making the entire people holy; their separation from their neighbours was made effective by the prohibition of mixed marriages; the Pentateuch, the true book of the laws, was given its final form and the revision known as the Priestly Code brought to completion. It seems certain, however, that these reforms introduced no fresh tendentious purposes, but took up and strengthened earlier trends.

five hundred years before Herodotus, the 'father of History'. It becomes easier to understand this achievement if, on the lines of our hypothesis, we think of Egyptian influence.¹ A suspicion even arises that the Israelites of that earliest period—that is to say, the scribes of Moses—may have had some share in the invention of the first alphabet.² It is, of course, beyond our knowledge to discover how far reports about former times go back to early records or to oral tradition and how long an interval of time there was in individual instances between an event and its recording. The text, however, as we possess it to-day, will tell us enough about its own vicissitudes. Two mutually opposed treatments have left their traces on it. On the one hand it has been subjected to revisions which have falsified it in the sense of their secret aims, have mutilated and amplified it and have even changed it into its reverse; on the other hand a solicitous piety has presided over it and has sought to preserve everything as it was, no matter whether it was consistent or contradicted itself. Thus almost everywhere noticeable gaps, disturbing repetitions and obvious contradictions have come about—indications which reveal things to us which it was not intended to communicate. In its implications the distortion of a text resembles a murder: the difficulty is not in perpetrating the deed, but in getting rid of its traces. We might well lend the word '*Entstellung* [distortion]' the double meaning to which it has a claim but of which to-day it makes no use. It should mean not only 'to change the appearance of something' but also 'to put something in another place, to displace'.³ Accordingly, in many instances of textual distortion, we may nevertheless count upon finding what has been suppressed and disavowed hidden away somewhere else, though changed and torn from its context. Only it will not always be easy to recognize it.

The distorting purposes which we are anxious to lay hold of must have been at work already on the traditions before any of them were committed to writing. We have already discovered

¹ Cf. Yahuda, 1929.

² If they were subject to the prohibition against pictures they would even have had a motive for abandoning the hieroglyphic picture-writing while adapting its written characters to expressing a new language. (Cf. Auerbach, 1932.) [Hieroglyphic writing included both signs depicting objects and signs representing sounds.]

³ ['*Stelle*' means 'a place', and '*ent-*' is a prefix indicating a change of condition.]

one of them, perhaps the most powerful of all. As we have said, with the setting-up of the new god, Yahweh, at Kadesh, it became necessary to do something to glorify him. It would be more correct to say: it became necessary to fit him in, to make room for him, to wipe out the traces of earlier religions. This seems to have been achieved with complete success as regards the religion of the resident tribes: we hear nothing more of it. With those returning from Egypt it was not such an easy matter; they would not let themselves be deprived of the Exodus, the man Moses or circumcision. It is true that they had been in Egypt, but they had left it, and thenceforward every trace of Egyptian influence was to be disavowed. The man Moses was dealt with by shifting him to Midian and Kadesh, and by fusing him with the priest of Yahweh who founded the religion. Circumcision, the most suspicious indication of dependence on Egypt, had to be retained but no attempts were spared to detach the custom from Egypt—all evidence to the contrary. It is only as a deliberate denial of the betraying fact that we can explain the puzzling and incomprehensibly worded passage in *Exodus* [iv, 24–6], according to which on one occasion Yahweh was angry with Moses because he had neglected circumcision, and his Midianite wife saved his life by quickly carrying out the operation.¹ We shall presently come across another invention for making the uncomfortable piece of evidence harmless.

The fact that we find signs of efforts being made to deny explicitly that Yahweh was a new god, alien to the Jews, can scarcely be described as the appearance of a fresh tendentious purpose: it is rather a continuation of the former one. With this end in view the legends of the patriarchs of the people—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—were introduced. Yahweh asserted that he was already the god of these forefathers; though it is true that he himself had to admit that they had not worshipped him under that name.² He does not add, however, what the other name was.

And here was the opportunity for a decisive blow against the Egyptian origin of the custom of circumcision: Yahweh, it was said, had already insisted on it with Abraham and had

¹ [Cf. p. 26.]

² [Cf. *Exodus*, vi, 3.] This does not make the restrictions upon the use of this new name more intelligible, though it does make them more suspect.

introduced it as the token of the covenant between him and Abraham.¹ But this was a particularly clumsy invention. As a mark that is to distinguish one person from others and prefer him to them, one would choose something that is not to be found in other people; one would *not* choose something that can be exhibited in the same way by millions of other people. An Israelite who was transplanted to Egypt would have had to acknowledge every Egyptian as a brother in the covenant, a brother in Yahweh. It is impossible that the Israelites who created the text of the Bible can have been ignorant of the fact that circumcision was indigenous in Egypt. The passage in Joshua [v, 9] quoted by Eduard Meyer [see p. 35 above] admits this without question; but for that very reason it had to be disavowed at any price.

We must not expect the mythical structures of religion to pay too much attention to logical coherence. Otherwise popular feeling might have taken justified offence against a deity who made a covenant with their forefathers with mutual obligations and then, for centuries on end, paid no attention to his human partners, till it suddenly occurred to him to manifest himself anew to their descendants. Even more puzzling is the notion of a god's all at once 'choosing' a people, declaring them to be his people and himself to be their god. I believe this is the only instance of its sort in the history of human religions. Ordinarily god and people are indissolubly linked, they are one from the very beginning of things. No doubt we sometimes hear of a people taking on a different god, but never of a god seeking a different people. We may perhaps understand this unique event better if we recall the relations between Moses and the Jewish people. Moses had stooped to the Jews, had made them his people: they were his 'chosen people'.²

¹ [Genesis, xvii, 9–14.]

² Yahweh was undoubtedly a volcano god. There was no occasion for the inhabitants of Egypt to worship him. I am certainly not the first person to be struck by the resemblance of the sound of the name 'Yahweh' to the root of the other divine name 'Jupiter (Jove)'. [The letter 'j' in German is pronounced like the English 'y'.] The name 'Jochanan' is compounded with an abbreviation of the Hebrew Yahweh—in the same kind of way as [the German] 'Gotthold [God is gracious]' and the Carthaginian equivalent 'Hannibal'. This name (Jochanan), in the forms 'Johann', 'John', 'Jean', 'Juan', has become the favourite first name in European Christendom. The Italians, in rendering it

The bringing-in of the patriarchs served yet another purpose. They had lived in Canaan, and their memory was linked with particular localities in that country. It is possible that they were themselves originally Canaanite heroes or local divinities, and were then seized on by the immigrant Israelites for their pre-history. By appealing to the patriarchs they were as it were asserting their indigenous character and defending themselves from the odium attaching to an alien conqueror. It was a clever twist to declare that the god Yahweh was only giving them back what their forefathers had once possessed.

In the later contributions to the text of the Bible the intention was put into effect of avoiding the mention of Kadesh. The place at which the religion was founded was fixed once and for all as the Mount of God, Sinai-Horeb. It is not easy to see the motive for this; perhaps people were unwilling to be reminded of the influence of Midian. But all later distortions, especially of the period of the Priestly Code, had another aim in view. There was no longer any need to alter accounts of events in a desired sense—for this had been done long before. But care was taken to shift back commands and institutions of the present day into early times—to base them, as a rule, on the Mosaic law-giving—so as to derive from this their claim to being holy

'Giovanni' and moreover calling a day of the week 'Giovedì [Thursday]', are bringing to light a resemblance which may possibly mean nothing or possibly a very great deal. At this point, extensive but very uncertain prospects open up before us. It seems that, in those obscure centuries which are scarcely accessible to historical research, the countries round the eastern basin of the Mediterranean were the scene of frequent and violent volcanic eruptions, which must have made the strongest impression on their inhabitants. Evans assumes that the final destruction of the palace of Minos at Knossos too was the consequence of an earthquake. In Crete at that period (as probably in the Aegean world in general) the great mother-goddess was worshipped. The realization that she was not able to protect her house against the assaults of a stronger power may have contributed to her having to give place to a male deity, and, if so, the volcano god had the first claim to take her place. After all, Zeus always remains the 'earth-shaker'. There is little doubt that it was during those obscure ages that the mother-goddesses were replaced by male gods (who may originally perhaps have been sons). The destiny of Pallas Athene, who was no doubt the local form of the mother-goddess, is particularly impressive. She was reduced to being a daughter by the religious revolution, she was robbed of her own mother and, by having virginity imposed on her, was permanently excluded from motherhood. [On the mother-goddesses, see below, pp. 83-4.]

and binding. However much the picture of the past might in this way be falsified, the procedure was not without a certain psychological justification. It reflected the fact that in the course of long ages—between the Exodus from Egypt and the fixing of the text of the Bible under Ezra and Nehemiah some eight hundred years elapsed—the Yahweh religion had had its form changed back into conformity, or even perhaps into identity, with the original religion of Moses.

And this is the essential outcome, the momentous substance, of the history of the Jewish religion.

(7)

Of all the events of early times which later poets, priests and historians undertook to work over, one stood out, the suppression of which was enjoined by the most immediate and best human motives. This was the murder of Moses, the great leader and liberator, which Sellin discovered from hints in the writings of the Prophets. Sellin's hypothesis cannot be called fantastic—it is probable enough. Moses, deriving from the school of Akhenaten, employed no methods other than did the king; he commanded, he forced his faith upon the people.¹ The doctrine of Moses may have been even harsher than that of his master. He had no need to retain the sun-god as a support: the school of On had no significance for his alien people. Moses, like Akhenaten, met with the same fate that awaits all enlightened despots. The Jewish people under Moses were just as little able to tolerate such a highly spiritualized² religion and find satisfaction of their needs in what it had to offer as had been the Egyptians of the Eighteenth Dynasty. The same thing happened in both cases: those who had been dominated and kept in want rose and threw off the burden of the religion that had been imposed on them. But while the tame Egyptians waited till fate had removed the sacred figure of their Pharaoh, the savage Semites took fate into their own hands and rid themselves of their tyrant.³

¹ At that period any other method of influencing them was scarcely possible.

² ['*Vergeistigte*.'] See below, Essay III, Part II (C) and p. 86, footnote.]

³ It is really remarkable how little we hear in the thousands of years of Egyptian history of the violent removal or murder of a Pharaoh. A

Nor can it be maintained that the surviving text of the Bible gives us no warning of such an end to Moses. The account of the 'wandering in the wilderness',¹ which may stand for the period during which Moses ruled, describes a succession of serious revolts against his authority which were also, by Yahweh's command, suppressed with bloody punishment. It is easy to imagine that one such rebellion ended in a way different from what the text suggests. The people's defection from the new religion is also described in the text—only as an episode, it is true: namely in the story of the golden calf. In this, by an ingenious turn, the breaking of the tables of the law (which is to be understood symbolically: 'he has broken the law') is transposed on to Moses himself, and his furious indignation is assigned as its motive.²

There came a time when people began to regret the murder of Moses and to seek to forget it. This was certainly so at the time of the union of the two portions of the people at Kadesh. But when the Exodus and the foundation of the religion at the oasis [of Kadesh] were brought closer together [p. 40], and Moses was represented as being concerned in the latter instead of the other man [the Midianite priest], not only were the demands of the followers of Moses satisfied but the distressing fact of his violent end was successfully disavowed. In actual fact it is most unlikely that Moses could have taken part in the proceedings at Kadesh even if his life had not been cut short.

We must now make an attempt at elucidating the chronological relations of these events. We have put the Exodus in the period after the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty (1350 B.C.). It may have occurred then or a little later, since the Egyptian chroniclers have included the succeeding years of anarchy in the reign of Haremhab, which brought them to an end and lasted till 1315 B.C. The next (but also the only) fixed point for the chronology is afforded by the stela of [the Pharaoh] Merenptah (1225–15 B.C.), which boasts of his victory over Isiraal (Israel) and the laying waste of her seed (?). The sense to be attached to this inscription is unfortunately doubtful, it is

comparison with Assyrian history, for instance, must increase our surprise at this. It may, of course, be accounted for by the fact that Egyptian history was entirely written to serve official ends.

¹ [Numbers, xiv, 33.]

² [Exodus, xxxii, 19.]

supposed to prove that the Israelite tribes were already at that time settled in Canaan.¹ Eduard Meyer rightly concludes from this stela that Merenptah cannot have been the Pharaoh of the Exodus, as had been lightly assumed previously. The date of the Exodus must have been earlier. The question of who was the Pharaoh of the Exodus seems to me altogether an idle one. There was no Pharaoh of the Exodus, for it occurred during an interregnum. Nor does the discovery of the stela of Merenptah throw any light on the possible date of the union and founding of the religion at Kadesh. All that we can say with certainty is that it was some time between 1350 and 1215 B.C. We suspect that the Exodus comes somewhere very near the beginning of this hundred years and the events at Kadesh not too far away from its end. We should like to claim the greater part of this period for the interval between the two occurrences. For we need a comparatively long time for the passions of the returning tribes to have cooled down after the murder of Moses and for the influence of his followers, the Levites, to have become as great as is implied by the compromise at Kadesh. Two generations, sixty years, might about suffice for this, but it is a tight fit. What is inferred from the stela of Merenptah comes too early for us, and since we recognize that in this hypothesis of ours one supposition is only based on another, we must admit that this discussion reveals a weak side of our construction. It is unlucky that everything relating to the settlement of the Jewish people in Canaan is so obscure and confused. Our only resort, perhaps, is to suppose that the name on the 'Israel' stela does not relate to the tribes whose fortunes we are trying to follow and which combined to form the later people of Israel. After all, the name of 'Habiru' (Hebrews) was transferred to these same people in the Amarna period [p. 29].

The union of the tribes into a nation through the adoption of a common religion, whenever it may have taken place, might easily have turned out quite an unimportant happening in world history. The new religion would have been carried away by the current of events, Yahweh would have had to take his place in the procession of departed gods in Flaubert's vision,² and all twelve of his tribes would have been 'lost' and not only the ten of them which the Anglo-Saxons have been in search of

¹ Eduard Meyer, 1906, 222 ff.

² [In *La tentation de Saint Antoine*.]

for so long. The god Yahweh, to whom the Midianite Moses then presented a new people, was probably in no respect a prominent being. A coarse, narrow-minded, local god, violent and bloodthirsty, he had promised his followers to give them 'a land flowing with milk and honey'¹ and urged them to exterminate its present inhabitants 'with the edge of the sword'.² It is astonishing how much remains, in spite of all the revisions of the Biblical narratives, that allows us to recognize his original nature. It is not even certain that his religion was a genuine monotheism, that it denied the divinity of the deities of other peoples. It was enough probably that his people regarded their own god as more powerful than any foreign god. If, nevertheless, in the sequel everything took a different course from what such beginnings would have led one to expect, the cause can be found in only one fact. The Egyptian Moses had given to one portion of the people a more highly spiritualized notion of god, the idea of a single deity embracing the whole world, who was not less all-loving than all-powerful, who was averse to all ceremonial and magic and set before men as their highest aim a life in truth and justice. For, however incomplete may be the accounts we have of the ethical side of the Aten religion, it can be no unimportant fact that Akhenaten regularly referred to himself in his inscriptions as 'living in Ma'at' (truth, justice).³ In the long run it made no difference that the people rejected the teaching of Moses (probably after a short time) and killed him himself. The *tradition* of it remained and its influence achieved (only gradually, it is true, in the course of centuries) what was denied to Moses himself. The god Yahweh had arrived at undeserved honour when, from the time of Kadesh onwards, he was credited with the deed of liberation which had been performed by Moses; but he had to pay heavily for this usurpation. The shadow of the god whose place he had taken became stronger than himself; by the end of the process of evolution, the nature of the forgotten god of Moses had come to light behind his own. No one can doubt that it was only the idea of this other god that enabled the people of Israel to

¹ [Exodus, iii, 8.]

² [Deuteronomy, xiii, 15.]

³ His hymns lay stress not only on the god's universality and oneness, but also on his loving care for all creatures; and they encourage joy in nature and enjoyment of its beauty. (Breasted, 1934, [281-302].)

survive all the blows of fate and that kept them alive to our own days.

It is no longer possible to estimate the share taken by the Levites in the final victory of the Mosaic god over Yahweh. They had taken the side of Moses in the past, when the compromise was reached at Kadesh, in a still live memory of the master whose retinue and compatriots they had been. During the centuries since then they had become merged with the people or with the priesthood, and it had become the main function of the priests to develop and supervise the ritual, and besides this to preserve the holy writ and revise it in accordance with their aims. But was not all sacrifice and all ceremonial at bottom only magic and sorcery, such as had been unconditionally rejected by the old Mosaic teaching? Thereupon there arose from among the midst of the people an unending succession of men who were not linked to Moses in their origin but were enthralled by the great and mighty tradition which had grown up little by little in obscurity: and it was these men, the Prophets, who tirelessly preached the old Mosaic doctrine—that the deity disdained sacrifice and ceremonial and asked only for faith and a life in truth and justice (Ma'at). The efforts of the Prophets had a lasting success; the doctrines with which they re-established the old faith became the permanent content of the Jewish religion. It is honour enough to the Jewish people that they could preserve such a tradition and produce men who gave it a voice—even though the initiative to it came from outside, from a great foreigner.

I should not feel secure in giving this account, if I could not appeal to the judgement of other enquirers with a specialist knowledge who see the significance of Moses for the Jewish religion in the same light as I do, even though they do not recognize his Egyptian origin. Thus, for instance, Sellin (1922, 52) writes: 'Consequently we must picture the true religion of Moses—his belief in the one moral God whom he preaches—as thenceforward necessarily the property of a small circle of the people. We must necessarily not expect to meet with it in the official cult, in the religion of the priests or in the beliefs of the people. We can necessarily only reckon to find an occasional spark emerging, now here and now there, from the spiritual torch which he once kindled, to find that his ideas have not entirely perished but have been silently at work here and there

upon beliefs and customs, till sooner or later, through the effect of special experiences or of persons specially moved by his spirit, it has broken out more strongly once more and gained influence on wider masses of the population. It is from this point of view that the history of the ancient religion of Israel is necessarily to be regarded. Anyone who sought to construct the Mosaic religion on the lines of the religion we meet with, according to the chronicles, in the life of the people during their first five hundred years in Canaan, would be committing the gravest methodological error.' Volz (1907, 64) speaks even more clearly: it is his belief that 'the exalted work of Moses was understood and carried through to begin with only feebly and scantily, till, in the course of centuries, it penetrated more and more, and at length in the great Prophets it met with like spirits who continued the lonely man's work.'

And here, it seems, I have reached the conclusion of my study, which was directed to the single aim of introducing the figure of an Egyptian Moses into the nexus of Jewish history. Our findings may be thus expressed in the most concise formula. Jewish history is familiar to us for its dualities: *two* groups of people who came together to form the nation, *two* kingdoms into which this nation fell apart, *two* gods' names in the documentary sources of the Bible. To these we add two fresh ones: the foundation of *two* religions—the first repressed by the second but nevertheless later emerging victoriously behind it, and *two* religious founders, who are both called by the same name of Moses and whose personalities we have to distinguish from each other. All of these dualities are the necessary consequences of the first one: the fact that one portion of the people had an experience which must be regarded as traumatic and which the other portion escaped. Beyond this there would be a very great deal to discuss, to explain and to assert. Only thus would an interest in our purely historical study find its true justification. What the real nature of a tradition resides in, and what its special power rests on, how impossible it is to dispute the personal influence upon world-history of individual great men, what sacrilege one commits against the splendid diversity of human life if one recognizes only those motives which arise from material needs, from what sources some ideas (and particularly religious ones) derive their power to subject both men and

peoples to their yoke—to study all this in the special case of Jewish history would be an alluring task. To continue my work on such lines as these would be to find a link with the statements I put forward twenty-five years ago in *Totem and Taboo* [1912–1913]. But I no longer feel that I have the strength to do so.